



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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believe me, to sow your seed sparingly would be not only a fatal speculation, but also a grave error from a moral point of view. 'To whom much is given, from him shall much be required,' saith the Scripture, and the man who concealed his talent was punished as severely as if he had been a spendthrift. What a treasure of wisdom there is in that Book, my Ernest, and how many of us fail to profit by it! Let us try, my boy, let us at any rate do our best to let the gifts which heaven gave you fructify. . . . If ever I saw you take a mistaken and irrevocable decision, it would be a life-long grief to me, and I should hear a voice asking, 'where is thy brother?' Weigh well my counsels, I entreat you. They are prompted by an affection so true, so free from any selfish thought, that I cannot fear to have them misunderstood either by you or by dear mother. Oh, would I could be with you, if only for a day, an hour! I think that by the very force of my conviction I could bring you to think as I do. . . ."

And so, throughout all the letters of which these fragments can give but a poor idea, there is that intense love, that self-devotion which was the mainspring of Henriette Renan's life. Some will perhaps be struck with what seems like selfishness in Renan: some of his letters indeed gave me that impression. But I fancy that the development of exceptional talents often involves a certain amount of self-culture to the detriment of others. And can one regret it in this case, when it is perhaps perceptible only because contrasted with Henriette's unselfishness; and, after all, had there been no Renan to live for, Henriette's beautiful existence might have been one of the countless lovely lives, unnoticed save by a few close friends, without other record than the one in heaven.

G. L. F.

OBEDIENCE.

BY M. MACEACHARN.

ARE the children of the present day obedient? Anyone who has much to do with children would emphatically answer "No," and parents meekly accept this state of things as a phase of the *Zeitgeist*, and therefore inevitable. Yet there never was a time when parents so unselfishly tried to do the best that can be done for their children. What then is the cause? We cannot reasonably put the blame on the children themselves.

Times of transition are always difficult and necessarily create a certain amount of confusion in theory and practice. The ideas of the educated world are undergoing a change in matters of education. Parents are beginning to understand what the word "education" means; they realise that each child has an individual personality and innate capacities to be developed; that he has a complex moral nature; and that over-severity and the suppression of spontaneity may do injury to the child. This realization creates a state of vacillation. We are so accustomed to having our preconceived convictions upset by the results of child study that we hesitate interfering with the child as we hesitate putting our finger on the wing of a beautiful moth. We have discovered so often that the child has been right and we wrong, and we are so afraid of being unjust to the child's nature that we almost shrink from asserting authority.

The weakening of conviction results in a weakening of will power. The child is quick to detect hesitation, and because he knows exactly what he wants the strength of his will frequently over-rides that of his parent, who is left wondering whether the object of the child's desire was caprice or necessity, and whether it was right to give way.

There are sentimentalists who argue that we have no right to demand obedience from the child, so that he may learn to command himself. There has even been a book

written by an American lady advocating these ideas, but however much we fail in exacting obedience from children, few of us in possession of well-balanced minds would acknowledge the wisdom of them. It is hardly advisable to invert domestic life, for if the child does not obey parents they must obey the child, as in an ordinary household they cannot easily act independently of one another. We must live in obedience to something. As reason develops obedience grows less conscious and more abstract; but with the child, who is occupied with the world of things, not of ideas, the motive of obedience must have a concrete form, or be meaningless. He must learn to obey clear and definite words before he can obey abstract ideals. We may not have more innate wisdom than the child, but at least we have the wisdom of experience, and it is right that the child should profit by that which we have.

One frequent cause of disobedience is the undue nervousness of mothers, which often prevents children having the necessary outlet to energy and spirits. Many mothers see and imagine dangers everywhere and are so afraid of possible catastrophes, and hedge children in with so many precautions, preventions and prohibitions, that the temptation to disobey becomes overwhelmingly strong, or else, the children become as over-cautious and nervous as their mothers themselves. A large amount of physical freedom children must have if they are not to become rebellious or spiritless. I do not believe one child in a hundred, under ten years of age, belonging to the upper classes, has sufficient freedom to run, jump, and climb, or to dabble in earth and water—to tumble and “mess” about, in other words.

People not in continual contact with children cannot realize what an enormous amount of energy and spirit is wasted by disobedience. It causes so much unnecessary friction, which might be avoided if only children were brought up to look upon obedience as a necessity, and not as an optional matter. Whether children do this or not depends largely upon the training they receive during the first three years of life. Who does not know the home where life is a whirl of unrest and friction? Why do nurseries so often resemble bear-gardens, rather than gardens for the nurture of delicate human souls? Simply because there is no

discipline. The life of a governess is made unnecessarily difficult nowadays by the amount of “breaking in” she has to do with each new pupil.

To give a small instance, but one which one can witness any day in Kensington Gardens, or anywhere that children congregate.

A child, sailing his boat, is called by his governess, and takes no notice; he is called again and still takes no notice; a third time he is called, and this time he responds, “I’m coming,” but calmly continues sailing his boat; then the governess, annoyed, hastens towards the child, lifts his boat out of the water, takes his hand in a not too patient frame of mind, and hurries homewards, meditating on the futility of words, and whether the child deserves a slight punishment.

It is a small matter, but this kind of thing occurring all day long is what makes life with children difficult and exhausting. Moreover, it wastes a great deal of time. Obedience, in spirit and in letter, is the only soil in which the educator can delve with any profit whatsoever.

Parents frequently say of boys, “Oh! they’ll learn discipline when they go to school.” Now, is it fair either to the boy or to the schoolmaster to postpone disciplinary training until school years? The longer training in the habit of obedience is put off the more difficult is it to acquire that habit. Who would think of saying, “Oh! he’ll learn to be truthful when he goes to school.”

It is the *necessity* of obedience that so many children fail to grasp. “Why must I?” one hears continually from their lips. This attitude of criticism and scepticism is hardly desirable in a child. Trustfulness is one of childhood’s most beautiful characteristics. It is that calm and joyful attitude of trustfulness and confidence which is so beautiful in the minds of some of our greatest thinkers — Emerson, for instance — for all great minds retain some of the charm of childhood.

A child may still retain an enquiring mind and yet have sufficient faith in parents, or those whom parents have chosen to guide their children, to believe that their authority is for his good, and not for the purpose of frustrating his plans and aims. One cannot help asking sometimes if children have even an elementary idea of the meaning of respect; and

where ideas of respect are undeveloped so will those be of reverence.

"This is the thing that I know and which, if you labour faithfully, you shall know also . . . that in Reverence is the chief joy and power of life : . . . Reverence for what is pure and bright in your own youth ; for what is true and tried in the age of others ; for all that is gracious among the living, great among the dead, . . . and marvellous in the powers that cannot die."

These beautiful words of Ruskin's have more meaning to one the older one grows. To a child, however, reverence can never be the chief joy and power of life, for the feeling of reverence "for all that is gracious among the living, great among the dead" is the outcome of many years of education in what is beautiful and true. The starting-point on the road to reverence is the feeling of respect, which develops as the habit of obedience is trained.

Another serious result of the slack discipline in modern homes is the over-bearing manner of many children towards servants.

What endless struggles are saved us when we have learned that our wills are ours not to gratify self, but that "Our wills are ours to make them Thine."

Our up-bringing of children should be more vigorous and manly and less sentimental.

Many people bring up children on the theory that love is enough, and that persuasion through love can do all things. We all have seen the fatal consequences of severity overridden by tenderness, where severity would have been the wise course to pursue. The power of love is infinite, but the soul requires some disciplinary preparation, as the world did, before it is capable of being appealed to by that power. We have to guard against mawkishness in training just as much as against over-severity. The love that encircles a child should not be of the idolising kind if we wish him to have a healthy attitude towards life. Even the word "love" can be heard too often by a child, for his frequent use of it in regard to such things as pears and bananas shows that it conveys but an elementary meaning to him. It is better for a child to be concerned with things and actions than to think much about his feelings for them. If he is talked to too much

about feelings he become undesirably introspective. If discipline is maintained entirely by love, what will be the result if the personal influence of the disciplinarian is withdrawn, as all personal influence is liable to be? Obedience should be based on a sense of duty, not on the emotions. Boys, in particular, are very reticent in regard to matters of sentiment. Is it not because in healthy boys feelings are unconscious, except when the sense of protection necessitates activity, as in the case of pet animals ; a boy is probably more conscious of his love for his rabbit than of his love for his younger brother. Of what avail is it to speak of brotherly love to a child whose brother has just smashed his favourite engine? The child has many battles to fight before he achieves the height of living by love. If we attempt to put ideals before the child which are those only of a highly-evolved mind, we shall produce that state which induces him to say, "It's no good trying to be good."

In the days when discipline was everything and self-activity not considered worthy of attention, it was, of course, much easier to maintain discipline, because self-activity was suppressed to such an extent that the child took for granted everything he wanted to do must be wrong. Now individuality is developed to such an extent that the child is inclined to think everything he wants to do must be right.

If we consider the history of the Stuarts do we not see that it was an absence of that submissive spirit, which sacrifices the will of the individual for the welfare of the many, which was the cause of the misfortunes of that unhappy race?

By obedience a child first receives some elementary ideas of law and the necessity of its recognition. A child not amenable to discipline is a disturbing element in society, a miniature Peer Gynt. Sooner or later he must learn that there are others in the world whose claims have to be considered. If trained to obey he grows up with that knowledge. History teaches us that in the earlier stages of civilization strict adherence to law is necessary for the development of morality, otherwise the disorderliness of life would leave no smooth places for the growth of virtue. Ultimately, law ceases to exist for the civilized man, for it has become a part of his nature. The German psychologist, Brentano, says : "Public laws, however much in the first instance established

under the influence of lower motives, were yet preliminary conditions for the free unfolding of our noblest capacities."* The same holds good in domestic life if we believe the history of the race to be repeated in that of the individual. People need preparation for self-government. We know that the Emancipation of the Slaves was not an unmixed blessing, either to themselves or to America at large, because they were not ready for the responsibilities thrust upon them.

Life is difficult, and we should not increase the child's difficulties by giving him too much freedom of choice in action. In home life, as in that of the State, discipline is a "preliminary condition for the free unfolding of our noblest capacities."

* *The Origin of the Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, by Franz Brentano, translated by Cecil Hague (Constable).

CO-EDUCATION.*

By F. RANKIN.

FOR those who are weary of the reiteration of the first principles of education, propounded as they have so often been lately from platform and pulpit, these first few lines are not written. Henceforth, every teacher fresh from the training college and eager to have his or her name upon the government register, will be scribbling in her examination what has during the time of probation become almost a mechanical formula. But at present there are still a few uninitiated, and for the benefit of these we must begin the discussion of all theories of education upon the recognised lines, and must have clearly before our minds what is meant by education in schools, mixed or otherwise. Later on we shall deal with the actual definition of the word itself, a definition which often differs so widely from the interpretation, but the early part of the discussion is concerned more with the end and aim of education and the purposes which it is intended to fulfil. These are not difficult to express in words. The development of every faculty so that it can be most wisely used; the formation of a character which will sustain the home, which will nevertheless at the crucial moment sink love of family in citizenship, citizenship in patriotism, and patriotism in devotion to humanity. We shall all agree that this view, expressed, though not exactly in those words, by a well-known educationist, is the only ideal that we may contemplate either within the walls of the school or beyond them. Whether conscious of such an aim or whether only dimly realizing the striving for it, all who have to do with the training of children are interested in its attainment.

In an article written some time ago for this magazine may be found these words: "Now man being made to live among men, we cannot go too far in the process of moulding the child

* Paper read before the Winchester Branch of the P.N.E.U.